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WITH MR. LEET'S COMPLIMENTS.

PAPER ON MARINE SANITATION. No. 17.

Defective Vision in Mercantile Marine Service.

THE NEW REGULATIONS FOR TESTING EYESIGHT.

Responsible Medical Adviser required at Head Quarters, Marine Department, Board of Trade, London, to check Evasions on the part of Steamship Managers and Employes.

True story of unblushing Evasions of Board of Trade requirements in one of the oldest and most fashionable Atlantic Lines.

DR. LEET'S Letter to THE LANCET, 9th February, 1895.

DEFECTS OF VISION IN THE MERCANTILE MARINE SERVICE.

To the Editors of THE LANCET.

SIRS,—In this seafaring community the published statements have made a profound impression that such shocking accidents as that of the *Elbe*, with its appalling loss of life, can be traceable to the defective eyesight of mercantile marine officers and sailors on ship-board as the probable cause of many such disasters, and "quite possibly," in the opinion of to-day's *Times*, "the actual cause in the case of the *Elbe*." So the public has good ground for asking the pertinent question: Why has not the Board of Trade kept pace with science, and revised their medical regulations? Why is the eyesight of the shipmaster tested for the last time upon obtaining the certificate of that rank instead of continuous re-examinations at intervals rendered necessary by age deterioration, bearing in mind that his previous examinations were incomplete on points of vital, practical importance in the commander of a passenger ship? For the correct reply to these questions we must go to the root of the evil. It is an open secret that the Marine Department of the Board of Trade has no medical adviser, no professional head analogous to the Director-General of the Medical Departments of the Army and of the Royal Navy. The medical surveyors, who are also the medical inspectors of emigration at our ports, and the unorganised crowd of ship surgeons, all should be in touch with the Board of Trade through such a head of a health department of the most important mercantile marine in the world. Until this appointment is made there will be no security that the forthcoming revised regulations *re* vision tests will not share the fate of other sanitary requirements of the Board of Trade, and be either evaded or carried out perfunctorily, as illustrated in my *paper upon the Medical Department of the Mercantile Marine, published in the recent volume of the Transactions of the Sanitary Institute (Congress at Liverpool, 1894).

I am, Sirs, yours faithfully,

C. H. LEET, F.R.C.S.

Sydenham, Norma Road, Waterloo,
Liverpool, February 2nd, 1895.

The Editor of the *Lancet*, in a leading article in the same issue on this subject, supports my recommendation for the appointment of a responsible Medical Adviser at the head-quarters, Marine Department, Board of Trade, thus :—

“It would do no harm if, as Mr. LEET suggests in his letter to us, some responsible adviser, “some professional head analogous to the Director-General of the Medical Department of the “Army, and of the Royal Navy, were appointed, whose business it should be to see that the “recommendations and orders of the Board of Trade on this point are carried out, and to whom “all complaints might be referred. This appointment would not enable the railway companies “to shirk their responsibility on the ground that the State certificate superseded their own duties, “as Mr. Bryce thought would occur if the tests were applied by a Government official. It would “simply ensure that the *provisions* for the safety of the travelling public were *duly enforced*.”

True story of unblushing evasions, for years, of H.M. Board of Trade Official
Instructions to Ship-Surgeons in the case of one of the foremost
Shipping Companies in the world.

Extracted from TRUTH's article, "Doctors at Sea," 24th August, 1893.

* * * “The important point is that the doctor should be in direct communication with the “Board. As a matter of theory, under the present Acts the ship's surgeon is supposed to report to “the Board of Trade; but how this theory works in practice is shown in the pamphlet of Mr. “CHARLES LEET, to which I have referred above. In their orders to ship's surgeons in the “Atlantic passenger trade, the Board of Trade request a report at the end of each voyage on “certain specified points, among others the following :—

“*Has the ship been Disinfected? (after any cases of infectious or contagious disease.)*

“*Was the Ventilation sufficient? If not, state where it was defective.*

“*Were any Complaints made by the emigrants? If so, state what complaints, and what “steps were taken in each case.*

“This report, the Board direct, shall be addressed to the Emigration Officer. In “Mr. LEET's case, the Company give their own instructions to the surgeon, purporting to “over-ride those of the Board of Trade. They direct him to furnish the Emigration Officer “in future with “the following particulars,” and the list which follows omits all the questions “quoted above. Finally, as though to ensure that their instructions shall be carried out, and not “those of the Board of Trade, they order that the report shall be sent in the ship's despatch-box “under cover to the General Manager of the Company. Mr. LEET attempted to transmit a “report direct to the Board, and was peremptorily ordered by the General Manager to sit down “and write another. When one of the foremost Shipping Companies in the world acts in this “way, what is to be expected of an unscrupulous and impecunious private owner?” * * *

What will the readers of "Truth" say when they read the worse part of this true story here following?

The Directors of C—— Co., by something very like bribery and corruption, induced their Ship Surgeons to insult and silence their consciences in the matter of these mutilated official Sanitary Reports. How? By the Company's influence with the President of the Board of Trade these "loyal" Surgeons were appointed Sanitary Surveyors and Government Medical Inspectors of Emigration as vacancies occurred on the Board of Trade staff at our largest seaport cities.* The gratitude of the Liverpool Ship Surgeon of the C—— Co., thus happily promoted at the port of Liverpool, was so deep that he accepted from myself (his successor as Ship Surgeon in C—— Co. upon his promotion) the C—— Co.'s mutilated form of the official Sanitary Reports, above described by *Truth*, similar to those furnished by himself, for the previous four years of his Ship Surgency, to his predecessor in office at the Board of Trade, Liverpool. Have the Directors unblushingly continued these dishonourable evasions? although exposed in the *British Medical Journal* review of my pamphlet "The Ship Surgeon of To-day," November, 1889. Exposed a second time in *Truth's* article "Doctors at Sea," 24th August, 1893. Exposed a third time at last September Liverpool Sanitary Congress, in my paper on "The Medical Department of the Mercantile Marine Service."

LIVERPOOL SANITARY CONGRESS, 25th September, 1894.

The President of the Conference on the Sanitation of the Passenger and Mercantile Marine Service abuses his position, as Chairman of the meetings, by praising the Steamship Company of which he is the prominent Liverpool Director, and asserts that the aforesaid evasions existed only in Dr. Leet's imagination!

Mr. LEET'S Letter to the Council of the Sanitary Institute addressed to the Secretary, 27th September, 1894.

SIR,—I have the honour to submit for the careful consideration of the Council of the Sanitary Institute the following statement bearing upon the remarks of Sir William B. Forwood, J.P., on my Paper: "The Medical Department of the Mercantile Marine Service," in his official position as President of the conference on the Sanitation of the Passenger and Mercantile Marine Service, and chairman of the meeting on the 25th inst., when that Paper was read by me personally. I beg to remind the Council that on my part I loyally carried out their orders to eliminate from the Paper all allusions to myself personally or to individual passenger companies, and the Council doubtless expected that their chosen President and Chairman would treat me in the same honourable and impartial spirit, particularly as I had in writing warned the Council that the Chairman might be tempted to abuse his position by discrediting any facts

*Mr. Leet's over-age for appointments in the Board of Trade. His only motive is the sanitary interests of the Mercantile Navy. How can it benefit his medical practice?

reflecting upon the honour of the Cunard Company in its dealings with H. M. Board of Trade *re* the Sanitary Instructions required by the Board from the Company's Ship Surgeons, but which had been for years unblushingly withheld by the Cunard managers, as detailed in my pamphlet annexed. I regret the Council disregarded my warning, for no official of the Institute was present at the meeting to protect science against the Chairman's unfair remarks on my Paper, displaying as he did a decided partisan spirit, making unjust and flippant allusions to me personally, ending his speech in a kind of panegyric on the Cunard Company; but the Council will be glad that I controlled my indignation, deciding to lay the matter before them to-day.

Here is the cutting from the *Liverpool Journal of Commerce*, the shipowners' daily newspaper on nautical matters:—

“THE MEDICAL DEPARTMENT OF THE MERCANTILE MARINE SERVICE.

“Mr. C. H. Leet, F.R.C.S. (Seaforth, Liverpool), read a paper upon this subject, and “urged that the ship's surgeon should be under Government control, instances having occurred of “the ship-master interfering at sea with the medical duties of the surgeon of the ship, and on “arrival home of the latter receiving no redress either from the medical superintendent or ship-owner, the Board of Trade also not having the necessary powers to interfere on his behalf with “the decision of the shipowner.

* “Dr. Collingridge, in proposing a vote of thanks to Mr. Leet, said that in the case of the “great shipping lines the complaint of Mr. Leet did not hold good.

“Sir W. B. Forwood said that so far as his experience went, doctors on board ship had “always found themselves supported by the master and by the shipowners in the discharge of “their duties. If Mr. LEET's suggestion was carried out the ship's surgeon would be placed in a “superior position to the captain, and there must only be one in command on shipboard. He “suggested that a good deal of the grievances complained of existed only in Mr. LEET's “imagination. It was not the experience of ships' surgeons in Liverpool.”—(*September 26th*).

I beg the Council to contrast these extraordinary assertions of the Chairman with the real facts, and official regulations as laid down by the Company for their Ships' Surgeons and Ships' Hospitals, contained in my pamphlet, “Shipowners and Ship Surgeons,” 1893, which includes *Truth's* article, “Doctors at Sea,” of 24th August, 1893. The Ship Surgeon therein alluded to is myself, so I am thoroughly qualified to speak with the authority of personal experience upon the degraded position of the Ship Surgeon of to-day.

I am, Sir,

Yours faithfully,

C. H. LEET, F.R.C.S.

WHITE WALLIS, Esq., Secretary,
Sanitary Institute, Liverpool.

I remonstrated with Sir Charles Cameron for deserting the meeting with Sir Thomas Crawford, they, being the officials of the Sanitary Institute, would have checked Sir William Forwood's trade-advertisement-like speech for the Cunard Company.

* Dr. Collingridge can only speak from his London experience, of which port he is Medical Officer.

Another foremost Shipping Company degrades their Medical Officers.

Mr. Alfred Holt, part-owner and manager of the wealthy Ocean Steamship Company, and his Medical Superintendent were present at the meeting. They also approve of degrading the Ship Surgeon, granting him no redress when he is insulted and his professional duties interfered with by a vulgar, tyrannical captain. * The Board of Trade having no power to interfere between shipowners and their slaves—the Ship Surgeons.

The public and Medical profession may clearly understand from these few facts that the Revised Medical Regulations, *re* Vision Tests, demand, for their efficient operation, the appointment at the head-quarters Marine Department Board of Trade of a RESPONSIBLE MEDICAL ADVISER. His duties should include:—

1. From a medical and sanitary standpoint, to eliminate all possible causes tending to imperil the health and safety of seamen and the travelling public afloat. To enforce the provisions of all Board of Trade Sanitary requirements and instructions. To receive complaints from the Medical Officer of Health—the Ship Surgeon—and protect and support him in carrying out his duties *conscientiously*.
2. To maintain the loyalty of his subordinates—the Medical Surveyors and Medical Emigration Inspectors—and suppress all “hoodwinking” on the part of the steamship manager.
3. The former to hold certificates from the central authority as efficient examiners for checking the ophthalmic certificates of officers and seamen in the merchant navy.
4. To promote medical certification of the cause of death, and coroner’s inquests in suspicious, accidental, and violent deaths, at the shipping office where the crew is paid off (bearing in mind that one-half of the mortality among seamen occurs without any loss of the ship).
5. To publish annually Report of Sickness and Mortality in the Merchant Navy, like the Naval Medical Report. [See Mr. Leet’s letter on Marine Sanitation, *British Medical Journal*, 17th June, 1893.

At every election in seafaring towns this appointment of Medical Adviser to Marine Department Board of Trade should be inserted in a clause of the political creed. Copies of this PAPER can be obtained from me.

Brigade-Surgeon Lieut.-Col. EVATT, M.D., Netley Hospital, wrote:—

“I beg to express my warm sympathy with you in the work you are doing for Ship Surgeons. I feel certain that they should have powers analagous to Medical Officers of Health on land. They should have a special Official Log or Record. . . . I am glad a medical man, trained in our service, is doing this *most needful work of reform*.”

Commander DAWSON, R.N., Secretary Missions to Seamen, London, wrote:—

“May I ask your aid in calling attention to preventible loss of life at sea. . . . I am deeply interested in medical questions affecting sailors, and know how much medical men can do to prevent mortality at sea and relieve sailors of many distresses. . . . I should be glad to help in any way *so good a friend of sailors as you are*.”

“Mr. LEET’s Pamphlet.”

* “The Ship-Surgeon of To-day,” pp. 17—21. Paper on Ship Sanitation, No. 14.

A prominent Board of Trade Official on "Truth's" article:—

"I have read *Truth's* article, 'Doctors at Sea,' and think that nothing could have been better or more reasonable. If the public demand these things themselves they are far more likely to get them than if the doctors do. . . . It has always appeared to me obvious that *we must have a Medical Officer at the Board of Trade* before we can even hope to get them to see the matter in the proper light. The triumph of Dr. Bickerton, of Liverpool (*re* the tests for colour blindness), one would have naturally thought sufficient to effect this purpose. . . . The Board of Trade deserves our pity rather than our blame. Surely the Sanitary interests of the Merchant Navy and of the ocean-going public, as well as the domestic interests involved at such times as the present, would lead one to think that the *Board of Trade requires medical advice and assistance*, as well as the War Office, Admiralty, and Local Government Board." (*Letter to Dr. Leet.*)

Dr. R. A. CALDWELL, of New York City, ex-Cunard Surgeon, wrote on 10th inst.:—

"I read with appreciation your excellent letter in the *Lancet* of yesterday. It is thoroughly to the point. . . . You should 'hammer away' for the only real remedy, viz., the appointment of a Medical Director to the Marine Department Board of Trade."

Dr. Bickerton, the leading Liverpool Oculist, wrote on 18th inst.:—

"I certainly approve of the suggestion that there should be a Medical Adviser to the Marine Department, Board of Trade."

"The Steamship" wrote, January, 1894:—

"Dr. LEET recommends the insertion of a clause in the new Shipping Bill dealing with ships' surgeons. He advocates that special powers should be conferred on them, analogous to those of a medical officer of Health on land, and that there should be a medical Adviser at headquarters, Marine Department, Board of Trade. This seems a very reasonable request, and one which should be granted."

The "British Medical Journal" wrote:—

"The present unsatisfactory status of ships' surgeons is a subject which demands the attention of the profession in this country, and the work is one in which the British Medical Association, through its Parliamentary Bills Committee, may bear a part."

"Judging from the numerous testimonials that he publishes we gather that Dr. LEET stands high, both professionally and socially."—*Liverpool Journal of Commerce.*

The Director-General Army Medical Department, War Office, London, wrote:—

"I shall be happy to bear testimony to your professional efficiency during your service."

"We have drawn attention in preceding numbers to Dr. LEET's excellent pamphlet on 'The Ship's Surgeon of To-day.' Dr. LEET is like a veritable Paladin, and is out single-handed to fight one of the most powerful trade combinations, viz., Shipowners. But the contest is unequal. He has suffered, and must suffer, in consequence of his zeal. The British Medical Association should come to his assistance, and take the work off his shoulders. It is not such an attractive subject as relative rank, but it is an infinitely more important one."—Editorial Article, *Provincial Medical Journal.*

"Mr. LEET was a constant attendant at the Liverpool Royal Infirmary, and lost no opportunity of keeping himself abreast of medical science. He is a man of gentlemanly character and stainless reputation."—*W. MITCHELL BANKS, F.R.C.S.*

C. H. LEET, F.R.C.S., Eng.,

SYDENHAM, WATERLOO,

LIVERPOOL, February 23rd, 1895.

Late Surgeon-Major, Army Medical Staff.

SHIPOWNERS AND SHIPS' SURGEONS.

BY CHARLES HENRY LEET, F.R.C.S., M.R.C.P.

Considering the unsatisfactory status and power of medical officers in the mercantile navy, it is a somewhat singular thing that no steps have been taken to remedy the fault. So thinks Dr. Leet; and still more to the purpose, he writes and agitates with an earnestness that carries conviction with it. Why, he very naturally asks, should the doctor be virtually treated as a man having no authority or power in matters upon which he alone, of all persons on board the ship, can have any expert knowledge? If he should desire to carry out any sanitary measures on board a passenger ship, he has no authority sufficiently strong to enforce such measures, even though they may be absolutely necessary in the interests of the passengers, emigrants, and crew.

Although Dr. Leet had filled the post of surgeon with credit to himself and with satisfaction to the principals of three large passenger-ship companies (as shown by the certificates given to him), yet directly he attempted to do his duty, as a sanitarian, he found himself placed in antagonism to the captain, regarded by the shipowners as a meddler (particularly when they were effected in that sensitive department, the pocket), and obliged by a sense of self-respect to retire from a position rendered so untenable.

The editor of *Truth*, with his usual readiness to espouse the cause of all who are unfairly dealt with, or engaged in an unequal struggle, wrote an excellent article in that paper last August, insisting on the reasonable proposition that a ship's surgeon should have power to exercise effective control over all matters relating to the health of passengers and crew; and pointing out that the proper way to ensure this would be to make the surgeon a representative of the Board of Trade, commissioned to report directly to that body on all matters within his jurisdiction, and responsible to them alone for the performance of his duties. *Rem acu tetigisti*, we may say of the editor of *Truth*.

Dr. Leet is also backed up by the leading medical journals and, both by energy and by argument, he is gradually bringing public opinion to bear on the subject, so that there is reason for hoping that before long the ship's surgeon's position will be properly strengthened, and that the health and welfare of passengers, emigrants, and crew will be suitably safeguarded.

Dr. Leet is fighting against a wealthy and united class, and not only deserves, but needs all the assistance that the profession and right-thinking persons can give him.



On "The Medical Department of the Mercantile Marine Service,"
by C. H. LEET, F.R.C.S.

ABSTRACT.

MR. C. H. LEET, F.R.C.S. (Seaforth, Liverpool), read a paper upon this subject.

He described the duties of Ship Surgeons towards the Port Sanitary Authorities as very serious and responsible. On arrival at a home port the Ship Surgeon is required to hand to the Customs Officer a medical Certificate signed by the Commander and himself, reporting any deaths, sickness on ship board from infectious or contagious disease, &c. The Ship Surgeon, precariously holding his office at the will of the shipowner, is under the nominal protection only of the Board of Trade in carrying out the laws of nautical hygiene, which must often necessarily involve expense on the part of the shipowner his master. He is exposed to the temptation of minimising the danger of infecting the port by waiving doubts in cases of difficult diagnosis, and so may risk a clean bill of health, to the relief of the captain and in the interests of the shipowner. Hence this is palpably the weakest link in the chain of our first line of defence against the importation of infectious disease into these realms, and the strongest argument for conferring an assured position under Government protection and control upon Medical Officers in the Mercantile Navy.

Mr. Leet next described the Ship Surgeon's duty to his employer and paymaster, the shipowner, with whose Medical Superintendent rests the responsibility of selecting and instructing the company's surgeons in their sanitary duties on shipboard at sea.

Mr. Leet urged that this official should be under Government control, instances having occurred of the shipmaster interfering at sea with the medical duties of the surgeon of the ship, and on arrival home, of the latter receiving no redress either from Medical Superintendent or shipowner, the Board of Trade also not having the necessary powers to interfere on his behalf with the decision of the shipowner.

Mr. Leet then read two official letters he received from the Board of Trade last month. In one the Board state that they have not issued regulations or instructions dealing with medical officers in the mercantile marine, while in the other letter the Board state that the printed sanitary Instruction Paper "is in use, has not been altered, and is handed by their Emigration officers to the surgeons of vessels clearing under the Passengers Acts." It appears that some shipping officials have issued for many years to their surgeons a "revised version" of this Board of Trade document, to the surprise of the medical and lay journals, who contend that such action conduces to lower H.M. Board of Trade in the estimation of the ship surgeon, encourages him to shut his eyes to insanitary conditions in the ship, and ties his hands in the matter of suggesting hygienic precautions.

Such a serious state of things palpably demands reform, and Mr. Leet recommends that powers analogous to those of his professional brother on land—the Medical Officer of Health—should be conferred upon the ship surgeon under Government control; or better still, to organize a Medical Marine Service, so frequently urged for years upon all European Governments by the Quarantine Authorities at New York.



